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THE IDENTITY CRISIS EXPERIENCED BY THE AMERICAN WOMAN, HER SEX AS A PERSONALITY PATTERNING AGENT, AND HER SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A VOCATIONAL SELF-CONCEPT AS IT IS EXPRESSED THROUGH OCCUPATIONAL ROLES ARE EXAMINED. DURING AN 8-YEAR PERIOD, RESPONSES TO AN OPINION QUESTIONNAIRE (WITH INTERVIEW FOLLOWUPS) WERE GATHERED FROM 300 PEOPLE. THESE REVEAL THAT WOMEN PREFER TO BE SUPERVISED BY, AND WORK BETTER FOR, MEN. THEY DO NOT ACCEPT FEMALE AUTHORITY IN MANY SITUATIONS. THEY ARE MORE TOLERANT OF MISTAKES MADE BY MALE SUPERVISORS. BOTH MEN AND WOMEN FELT THAT WOMEN HAD DIFFICULTY WITH SUPERVISORY POSITIONS BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT LEARNED HOW TO USE AUTHORITY. MORE THAN 75 PERCENT OF THE RESPONDENTS CHARACTERIZED THE AVERAGE FEMALE AS BEING EMOTIONALLY UNSTABLE, OVERLY COMPETITIVE, INSECURE, AND PREOCCUPIED ON THE JOB WITH HOME RESPONSIBILITIES. THE SUCCESSFUL WOMAN "BEHAVED MORE LIKE A MAN" WHEN SHE WAS SECURE, POLITE, CALM, CASUAL, AND LOGICAL. THE STUDY CONCLUDES THAT SOME DEFINITION OF A FUNCTIONAL MODEL WHICH WOULD ENABLE WOMEN TO OPERATE IN A MAN'S WORLD IS NEEDED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE AMERICAN PERSONNEL AND GUIDANCE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION (DALLAS, MARCH 1967). (AO)

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SEX AS A PERSONALITY FACTOR IN THE
VOCATIONAL ADJUSTMENT OF WOMEN*

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The increasing complexity of the personal, social, and technical demands of our society make it imperative that counselors devote their attention to the most neglected guidance frontier today, the meaningful counseling of women.

The lack of personal adjustment in women has resulted in serious loss of the economic, familial, and social functions specifically assigned to women as well as those which are more discretionary prerogatives and privileges. Recent publications from the U. S. Department of Labor describe the changing patterns in women's lives (3) and suggest that because of this revolution some counselors must expand their backgrounds enough to specialize in the counseling of women. (2)

The problem of the American woman has been widely discussed in both the popular and professional literature attesting to its reality. This problem is frequently defined in the counseling process as an identity crisis in which a woman is either overwhelmingly conscious of her sexual identification or she is seemingly totally rejecting of the assignment given her at birth.

Our purpose here will be to examine this identity crisis as it relates to a woman's membership in her primary group, the female sex, sex as a personality patterning agent, and success or failure in the development of a vocational self-concept as it is expressed through occupational roles.

The failure to realistically communicate one of the principle causes of women's problems, their inability to cope with sexual identity, has contributed not only to the increased behavior pathology of the female sex but it has also aggravated the tension between the sexes.

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Personality theory describes the processes by which a self-concept is developed and how this regulates behavior. (4) The development of the self-concept is dominated by societal overtones and is a product of the reflected appraisals of others. (6)

The personality of a woman manifests itself in relation to others, frequently in status roles. Status, being a social relationship, is a mutual interaction between two persons, since you must have status in relationship to someone else. One's status relationship is enacted through a role assigned by one's culture, which prescribes and proscribes specific behavior patterns in relation to that role. The specific example to be discussed here will be supervisory role relationships.

In many real-life situations role-taking means earnestly behaving as, and therefore actually being, a particular social person in relation to other persons. Many women not only are not clear about how they should react in relation to other persons, but their own self-reactions, the behavior of an individual in direct relation to himself as a social object, needs examining. To the extent that a woman in the course of personality development, learns to take social roles skillfully and realistically acquires an adequate repertory of them, and becomes adroit in shifting from one role to another when she is in difficulty, she should grow into a flexible, adaptive social adult with minimal susceptibility to behavior disorders. (1)

The person with no workable concept of self has no role definition and therefore has no prescription for interaction.

The identity crisis is expressed in the counseling relationship in the plea, "I want to BE someone." As if she were no one now. Such claims to anonymity are groundless. There is no one who is no one. Everyone is someone. Women are women inasmuch as anatomy is destiny. The only refinement possible in the role question then is "What KIND of a woman do I want to be?" In what way will each woman express her sexual identity?

Emancipation encouraged women to forsake the wholeness of the domestic identity for the fragmentation of work as a total or partial solution to their identity question. Role enactments outside the home gained, in the minds of many women, in status and provided them with a fragmentation complex which they interpreted as more ego-integrating. Discrimination, a concomitant development with emancipation, created a situation wherein all women have had to deal with the ego-deflating self-image produced by the behavior of specific women in vocational and social settings. This has created an invisible environmental threat which evolves into a pervasive sensitivity on the part of all women which is often reflected in the resultant employment of defense mechanisms including rigidity and hostility. These attitudes are directed primarily, covertly and overtly, at the male sex. Discrimination in its vocational setting is both fact and fiction. The factual portion is based upon the realistic unsuitability of the female sex to perform some tasks. More commonly, it is due, not to male prejudice but to defects in the female's technique of sharing perspectives common to her society.

A woman must indeed feel she is someone before she has a role, consciously or unconsciously, from which she can relate both to herself and those around her. Her lack of self-identity is reflected in her personality, her individual collection of sex-linked characteristics derived from the patterning agents present during her socialization. This collection of traits, (influenced primarily by her mother who operates from a frame of reference unlike that destined to be her daughter's,) is oftentimes ill-suited for the performance she is called upon to make in the male world of business and the professions.

To achieve success in this male world of the labor market, which is now an economic necessity for millions of women rather than a mythical plaything (8), women are being called upon to revise their image.

In 1958 a San Francisco Bay area Chamber of Commerce asked me to teach a course in Human Relations for women, with a particular emphasis on personality characteristics of women. The remark of a Bay area executive typified the feeling of many of the Chamber members: "I like women. I just don't like the way they are."

In order to gather data that would be useful for the group, the opinions of 75 men and 50 women randomly selected from company supervisors were explored within the framework of the interaction between men and women in supervisory positions which constituted a status-role relationship. The three basic assumptions underlying this investigation were (1) personal characteristics exhibited by women in relation to male supervisors will differ from those exhibited toward women supervisors; (2) the personal characteristics which are the focus of counseling will be exhibited as women operate on the job in some setting which imposes threat; (3) supervisors, either actually or semantically, constitute a threat variable in most employment situations.

Interviewees were asked to list the ten traits they felt were most typical of women (1) when they were supervised by other women; (2) when they were supervised by men; (3) when they supervised other women; (4) when they supervised men, and (5) traits they felt were typical of women generally. The survey begun in the San Francisco Bay area in California in 1958 was continued in the Moscow-Lewiston, Idaho area in 1963 and in Austin, Texas in 1966 with a total N of 300 respondents to the questions and interview follow-up. For our purposes here we can only summarize the responses and interview elaboration. Q.1. Traits typical of women supervised by other women; compared with Q.2. Traits typical of women supervised by men: 91% of the men and 94% of the women felt that women preferred to be supervised by men. Women, both sexes agreed, work better for men and do not accept female authority in many situations, with some professional exceptions. Women employees were said to be more tolerant of mistakes made by male supervisors and were very critical of women in status roles superior to their own.

Q.3. Traits typical of women supervising women; compared with Q.4. Traits typical of women supervising men. 86% of the men and 91% of the women felt that women had difficulty with supervisory positions because they have not learned to use authority, i.e., they always use more than is necessary with both male and female supervisees. Women supervisors are always competent, to the point of being perfectionists, however, and they "take themselves too seriously," perhaps from the "need to prove themselves." Both sexes felt, too, that some few women were aware of the various female foibles and attempted to guard against them. Women felt generally that women who had seemed to achieve some personal stability and professional success were "unreal." Men simply felt that they were rare, were comfortable in their role of being a woman, and made "choice employees".

More than 75% of the male and female respondents characterized the average female as having the following traits: emotionally unstable, overly competitive, insecure, and preoccupied on the job with home responsibilities. Both sexes agreed the successful woman "behaved more like a man" when she exhibited the traits of security and politeness, and was more calm, casual, and logical. Nearly all of the respondents agreed that women had many positive characteristics but they were generally not obvious initially because of the inherent anxiety in women when they found themselves in a position which they interpreted as threatening.

Early in the survey I began to formulate, for the purposes of discussion, the concepts of "woman" and "female" to distinguish between the "competent, pleasant, secure, respected, achieving woman" and the "anxious, chattering, shallow, shrewd female who uses her sex to get ahead and is devoid of any business or professional commitment." Male respondents agreed unanimously that the "woman" could fill many positions which would be closed to "females". Apparently the discrimination practiced by employers is directed not at "women" but at "females" who have not learned to cope with threat sufficiently to participate in team work and familiarize themselves with the ground rules of the still male world of work.

The responses from 1963 to 1967 indicated that the Civil Rights Act would not prevent employers from hiring women whom they felt were not suited to their vocational setting. The "woman-type woman" did not need the protection of the Act for job entrance as much as the "female" did.

Employers and supervisors agreed unanimously that a woman "has several strikes against her just by being a woman" if she intends to compete in "neutral" or "male" fields, and that these women had to be considerably more talented, socially skilled, attractive, and astute than did men to get and maintain the more desirable jobs. They further agreed the "woman-type woman" could hold positions held by most men but "females" perpetuated the discrimination against women generally.

The negative characteristics assigned to women by the respondents in this survey have many similarities and semantic duplications and are generally symptomatic of ego-malformation or malfunction and corresponding insecurity. The lack of identity, lack of awareness of one's identity, or refusal to

simply accept "who you are," is a function of the relationship between primary group membership, (in this case, the female sex) on the one hand, and characteristic modes of action, thought, and feeling on the other.

A woman's self-concept is expressed through her personality, the end product of the expectations of others transmitted and perceived in interpersonal interaction, and women's expectations of women, particularly in the case of a mother, delineate the circumference of the role possibilities for any given member of the female sex. Women delineate role expectations for their daughters in such a negative way, according to Rheingold (7), that this negative continuum is not broken even in marriage.

There is a need for some definition of a functional model which would allow women to operate in a man's world. Weston La Barre (5) says: "The world requires (women) who can accept and be tolerant of differences among human beings' who are not chronically frustrated and hence not vicious; who can question their beliefs; who can deal with reality confidently; who are not committed to the blind emotional defense of fixed positions. " In order to do these things -- to be accepting, tolerant, questioning, confident, and able to cope with reality, -- a woman must be secure as a woman. Secure and comfortable in her sexual identity. How can a woman who cannot even recognize reality cope with it realistically? Rheingold suggests that counselors and therapists can provide an environment wherein women can learn to deal competently and realistically with threat; where women can gain increasing self-affirmation, critical judgment, and involvement in life in a perceptive and protective way.

The needless and deplorable underdevelopment of women's potential has been labeled by numerous national figures recently as a trend which must be reversed and very soon. Counselors, in their unique position, have the opportunity and responsibility to broaden their own preparations to the point where they can ameliorate the conditions in which women find themselves today.

This is a new world, one of involvement and evolution. It is a world in which counselors must create a total awareness of the individual and perceptivity of the ground rules for human fulfillment. This is the well-spring for the development of the potential of women.

There is adequate basis for the evident confusion and anxiety manifest by women of all ages in America as they attempt to design new life styles in a society undergoing vast, significant, and subtle total change. New problems cannot be solved with old tools and concepts, and the American woman has no precedent for a model as she faces problems no other woman in the world has faced or solved. And the tendency of women to look at the future through a rear view mirror mitigates against solution.

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